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SUBJECT: IDF DEPUTY COS KAPLINSKY UPDATES A/S WELCH ON
DISENGAGEMENT AND THE WAY AHEAD

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

1. (C) Summary: In an August 22 meeting, IDF Deputy Chief of Staff MG Moshe Kaplinsky told Assistant Secretary Welch, the Ambassador, and Security Coordinator General Ward that disengagement is proceeding ahead of schedule. Kaplinsky praised ongoing GOI-PA security coordination and expressed hope that it will continue after disengagement is completed. Kaplinsky and his staff expressed concern about whether the PA can maintain calm as the IDF prepares to leave Gaza and suggested that international pressure might help. The Israelis discussed the possibility of creating positive momentum from disengagement, and A/S Welch and the Ambassador noted the importance of the border crossings, especially Rafah. Kaplinsky said the GOI plans to maintain the region vacated by settlers in the northern West Bank as "area C" so that it can be used as a concession in future negotiations. Kaplinsky said that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz had told PA Interior Minister Nasir Yusuf that the issue of ammunition and firearms for PA security forces could be discussed after disengagement is completed. End summary.

Disengagement Ahead of Schedule

2. (C) A/S Welch commended the IDF for its role in the disengagement process. Kaplinsky noted that the mission had been difficult for the troops, but careful planning had permitted the security forces to accelerate the timetable and clear Gaza of settlers in less than one week. He predicted that Homesh and Sa Nur in the northern West Bank would be evacuated by the evening of August 23 despite the presence of 2,000 infiltrators.

3. (C) According to Kaplinsky, 50 percent of the settlers in Gaza had left some of their personal belongings behind. A private company will pack these effects and transport them to Israel within a week. Working in all of the former settlements simultaneously, the IDF will then destroy housing units and remove military equipment, a process Kaplinsky estimated would be completed nearly three weeks earlier than planned, i.e., by September 15. In the West Bank, the IDF will also remove the rubble.

4. (C) Col. Zohar Palti, the deputy director for military affairs in the IDF intelligence branch, expressed concern that the Palestinians will attempt to enter the settlements before the IDF departs. Kaplinsky indicated that the GOI is aware of planned PIJ attacks in the southern West Bank (note: far from the settlements being evacuated, but on the route used by Israeli personnel redeploying from Gaza to the north) and is uneasy about incitement and unhelpful rhetoric during Palestinian celebrations in Gaza. He stressed the importance of "continuing the pressure" on the Palestinians to maintain calm until the last IDF soldier departs Gaza, specifically mentioning the constructive role that Egypt can play.

IDF Wants Coordination With PA to Continue

5. (C) Thanking General Ward for U.S. assistance, Kaplinsky described coordination between the IDF and PA forces as "very, very, very good" at all levels. He expressed hope that this cooperation will continue after disengagement is complete. Gen. Ward said he had told PA Interior Minister Yusuf that coordination must continue.

Security is Key to Progress on the "Day After"

6. (C) Palti stressed the importance of the "day after" in Gaza, adding that the Palestinians have much to prove if they want to move to the roadmap. Kaplinsky and Palti both questioned how long the convergence of interests between the PA and extremist groups will last once disengagement is completed and campaigns for the PA assembly begin. Palti charged that the PA has taken few concrete steps to maintain the calm, has not arrested extremists, and lacks the political will -- but not the capabilities -- to confront radical groups. He noted recent remarks by President Mahmud Abbas on continuing the jihad and statements by Hamas leaders

that they intend to continue attacks.

17. (C) Chief of Strategic Planning BG Udi Dekel was more positive in his assessment, saying that the current situation demonstrates that the PA can create an atmosphere unfavorable to attacks. Kaplinsky suggested using both incentives and pressure to maintain the calm. He hoped that Egypt, the United States and others can influence the Palestinian factions, but noted that Israel remains prepared to respond to any attack. A/S Welch said that newly changed Egyptian views on security in Sinai offer a basis for closer counterterrorism cooperation with Israel. General Ward agreed that maintaining security after disengagement is key and can be addressed through a number of separate channels.

18. (C) Dekel stressed the importance of creating positive momentum from disengagement, listing withdrawal from Philadelphia, improvements in border crossings, and resumption of mutual steps under the Sharm el-Sheikh commitments as ways to promote a positive atmosphere. A/S Welch agreed, noting the effect that such steps would have on public opinion. Kaplinsky replied that the GOI will only be able to move forward on the peace process if the security situation remains calm.

19. (C) The Ambassador noted that the Palestinians consistently tell USG officials that Rafah is their highest non-security priority. Kaplinsky said that he sees the focus on Rafah as a tactic; the Palestinians' main concern is freedom of movement between the West Bank and Gaza, as well as within the West Bank. Suggesting a flexible policy on the highly symbolic issue of Rafah, A/S Welch noted that controls on the Gaza-Egyptian line and on the Gaza-Israel border reinforce each other. He requested that the GOI consult with Embassy Tel Aviv to ensure that the USG fully understands Israel's needs and interests, especially if the GOI decides to pursue options involving third parties.

Northern West Bank to Remain "Area C"

10. (C) A/S Welch asked about GOI plans to maintain the region vacated by settlers in the northern West Bank as "area C." Speaking candidly, Kaplinsky replied that he believed the area would eventually be turned over to PA control, but the GOI wants to retain this concession for use in future negotiations. He noted that the IDF plans to vacate the area and only reenter in response to direct security threats. Kaplinsky added that DefMin Mofaz had told Nasir Yusif that "now is not the time" to discuss changing the status of additional areas, but that the two sides could meet after disengagement to discuss the issue.

Equipping the PA Security Forces

11. (C) At the end of the meeting, General Ward mentioned that he would see COGAT commander General Yosef Mishlev to discuss the transfer of equipment to the PA security forces. A/S Welch said that the Palestinians continue to insist that they need ammunition and firearms. Kaplinsky responded that Mofaz had told Yusif that the subject could be addressed after disengagement is completed.

12. (U) A/S Welch has cleared this message.

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